United Nations A/C.3/64/SR.1

General Assembly
Sixty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
16 November 2009
English
Original: French

Third Committee

Summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 5 October 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Penke ..... (Latvia)

Contents

Election of officers

Statement by the Chairman

Organization of work

Agenda item 61: Social development

(a) Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

(c) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

09-54154 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m.

Election of officers

1. **The Chairman** recalled that candidates to serve as Vice-Chairs of the Committee had been proposed by the African States Group (Mrs. Hoosen (South Africa)), the Asian States Group (Mr. Rastam (Malaysia)) and the Latin America and Caribbean States Group (Mr. Perez (Peru)).

2. *Mrs. Hoosen (South Africa), Mr. Rastam (Malaysia) and Mr. Perez (Peru) were elected Vice-Chairpersons by acclamation.*

3. **The Chairman** said that the Western European and Other States Group had proposed Mrs. Hill (New Zealand) for the position of rapporteur.

4. *Mrs. Hill (New Zealand) was elected by acclamation.*

Statement by the Chairman

5. **The Chairman** hoped that the session would take place in a positive atmosphere, as had the informal consultations, and that delegations would try to find grounds for agreement. For his part, he promised to see that the debates proceeded smoothly and transparently, and invited delegations to put to him any questions, problems or suggestions.

Organization of work (A/64/250, A/C.3/64/1, A/C.3/64/L.1 and A/C.3/64/L.1/Add.1)

6. **The Chairman** said that the list of agenda items allocated to the Third Committee was contained in document A/C .3/64/1. He drew attention to chapter II of the report of the General Committee (A/64/250), which contained recommendations with regard to the conduct of the Committee's work. He stressed the three guidelines relating to limiting the number of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, shortening the resolutions, and leaving sufficient time for the Secretariat to prepare estimates of expenditures and for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee to examine them.

7. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) announced several amendments to the programme of work (A/C.3/64/L.1), a new numbering sequence for the agenda (A/C.3/64/1) and changes in the list of documentation submitted to the Third Committee (A/C.3/64/L.1/Add.1). He noted that the report on the Durban Review Conference (A/CONF.211/8) would be transmitted in a forthcoming report from the Secretary-General and that the Secretary-General's note transmitting the report of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Conference against Transnational Organized Crime (A/64/99) would appear as item 104 on the agenda. He then read out a list of the names of the special procedure mandate holders and the chairpersons of the working groups who would be presenting reports at the current session, and announced that senior officials of United Nations agencies would be addressing the Committee.

8. **The Chairman** called on delegations to respect the timetable of the programme of work as far as possible, to prepare as quickly as possible any draft resolutions that would require lengthy negotiations, to respect all the deadlines scrupulously, and to advise the Committee secretariat or a Committee officer if they intended to make proposals, and he invited the Committee to adopt these recommendations.

9. *It was so decided.*

10. **The Chairman** said he took it that, following established practice, the Committee wished to extend invitations to the special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and the Chairpersons of treaty bodies or working groups to present their reports to the Committee and to participate in question-and-answer sessions.

11. *It was so decided.*

12. **The Chairman** said he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the programme of work is contained in documents A/C.3/64/L.1 and Add.1, together with the provisions orally revised by the Secretary, with the understanding that adjustments could be made.

13. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 61: Social development (A/64/65 and A/64/180)

(a) Implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/64/157, A/64/158 and A/64/158/Corr.1)

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (A/64/61-E/2009/3, A/64/132, A/64/132/Corr.1 and A/64/134)

(c) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/64/127)

14. **Mr. Sha Zukang** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) stressed the combined effects that the global financial, food and energy crises and climate change were having on social development. Unemployment was rising, and it was expected that number of people who would fall below the poverty threshold this year would be 100 million more than was forecast before the crisis. It was essential to set out an integrated strategy for eliminating poverty and moving forward with social development, and to give priority to meeting the vital needs of the poorest and most vulnerable in order to prevent a worsening of social exclusion and tensions.

15. Recalling the main fields of action of the Third Committee, he noted that, while the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples had won the adherence of a growing number of countries, it was essential now for all Member States to implement it fully. The Committee could also help improve the fate of persons with disabilities by committing Member States to take their needs into account in policies and programmes for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In collaboration with Member States and other United Nations agencies, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was working to define indicators adapted to the situation of each country, which could be used to monitor application of the World Programme of Action for Youth for the Year 2000 and Beyond. Finally, he said, the Committee could identify the obstacles preventing the elderly from participating fully in economic and social life, and determine how their rights could be recognized in United Nations human rights instruments.

16. To make social integration a lasting reality, national strategies were needed to encourage growth and equity, as well as sound social protection systems. The Global Jobs Pact, which sought to promote decent work, and the Vulnerability Framework adopted by the G-20 to strengthen social safety nets were promising initiatives in this matter. Social protection was an imperative for development and a fundamental right, which the Committee could promote by defending the idea of universal social coverage. Along with Government-run social protection systems, cooperatives also offered essential help to the most vulnerable, and Member States were invited on this point to support the proposal for an international year of cooperatives.

17. Violence against women and girls was still a persistent phenomenon, taking many forms around the world, and it too compromised development. It was encouraging, then, to note the stepped-up activities within the framework of the Secretary-General's campaign, "Unite to End Violence against Women". With the approach of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the 15 year review of the Declaration and Programme of Action of Beijing and the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council devoted to gender equality and the empowerment of women, all Member States, agencies of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders were invited to propose new partnerships and new initiatives to give effect to the commitments taken and to make a real change in the fate of women.

18. **Mr. Gonnot** (Acting Director, Division of Social Policies and Social Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) introduced the Secretary-General's reports submitted under agenda item 61. The report on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly gave an overview of discussion on the priority topic of social integration during the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Social Development and of the impact of the current global crises on social development and social integration, areas in which progress remained limited. Governments committed themselves there to take measures to improve the implementation of programmes for this purpose, bearing in mind specifically the instability of food and energy prices, and to adopt comprehensive cross-sectoral social policies that would reduce the adverse impact of the crisis on the most disadvantaged. With respect to the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) the report highlighted the recent adoption by the African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development of a series of recommendations intended to promote sustainable economic growth in African countries and to limit the impact of the global crisis on the most vulnerable groups. The report concluded with the urgent necessity to combat social exclusion, which was impeding poverty reduction efforts and plaguing economic growth and social development, and stressed that social integration must become a high priority for Governments, the international community, and all stakeholders in development

19. The report entitled "World Social Situation 2009: Overview" (A/64/158) analysed global and regional poverty trends over the period 1981-2005. It showed that the world was not on track to meeting the Millennium Development Goals for reducing extreme poverty by 2015, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It found that the economic and financial crisis was reversing the modest progress of the last 10 years and also threatening growth prospects. The effects of macroeconomic policies, characterized by the current trend to more flexible labour markets and greater resort to informal work, had often aggravated insecurity, and the report stressed the importance of policies to promote employment and decent work for all, as well as social protection programmes. It challenged the conventional approach based on market forces, and recommended that Governments intervene and coordinate their economic and social policies in order to create jobs, reduce inequalities, promote social justice, and in this way end poverty.

20. The report on the role of cooperatives in social development (A/64/132) demonstrated how farmers could pool their resources, reduce their production costs, and gain better access to world supply chains, thereby increasing their incomes. Cooperatives were engaged in fair trade, which guaranteed better prices for small-scale producers, and credit unions and cooperative banks were playing an essential role in improving food security and enhancing growth at the local level, by giving poor households the chance to obtain credit and offering microfinance services to small and medium-sized enterprises. Several Member States and cooperative organizations had come out in favour of proclaiming an international year of cooperatives to raise public awareness and highlight the development role of cooperatives.

21. The report on follow-up to the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family (A/64/134) highlighted measures for social protection and intergenerational solidarity and put forward recommendations in favour of partnership between youth and older persons' organizations, as well as programmes to foster participation by all generations. Governments should introduce institutional frameworks to promote the family and take steps to guarantee respect for the rights of the family and its members, with a particular focus on reconciling family and working life, encouraging gender equality, and reinforcing the campaign against discriminatory practices, within a coherent policy framework.

22. The report on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/64/127) dealt with the rights of older persons as proclaimed in documents adopted internationally. It analysed national capacities in this area and provided examples of good practices in the area of social protection, and recommended that Governments take steps to improve older peoples' access to information about their rights and to ensure that all policies relating to older persons would promote gender equality. It called on Governments to conduct a study on violations of older peoples' rights and to give consideration to ways of improving international standards relating to the elderly.

23. The report entitled "Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities through the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (A/64/180) analysed the situation of handicapped persons in light of national reports, and highlighted initiatives taken by Member States, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

24. Finally, the report entitled "Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth: progress and constraints with respect to the well-being of youth and their role in civil society" (A/64/61-E./2009/3) addressed two remaining clusters dealing with 11 priority themes of the World Programme of Action for Youth and proposed targets for implementing the programme and defining progress indicators. It stressed the importance of investments in youth, which would be of benefit to all society.

25. **Mr. Rastam** (Malaysia), noting that it was still too soon to gauge precisely the impact that the crisis was having on achievement of social development objectives, asked what measures were being taken by United Nations agencies to support domestic efforts in this area, and how the Secretariat intended to bring greater coherence to the activities of the different organs of the system, given the interdependent nature of these questions.

26. **Mr. Gonnot** (Acting Director, Division of Social Policies and Social Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) said that several initiatives have been taken within the Chief Executives Board to bring greater coherence to system-wide action in support of national efforts, in particular the Global Jobs Pact and programmes to promote employment and decent work under the Second United Nations Decade

for the Eradication of Poverty. He welcomed the collaboration demonstrated among all agencies at the highest level and added that efforts had been made to harmonize the work of the Second and Third Committees, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission for Social Development, and the General Assembly.

27. **Mrs. Halabi** (Syrian Arab Republic) wondered if attention was being given to the consequences of the crisis on the social development of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, and regretted that no reports have been presented on this question. She urged the international community to come to the assistance of people living in war zones or under foreign occupation and stressed that it was the duty of the United Nations and its Member States to concern themselves with these problems, which were intimately interlinked and of fundamental importance.

28. **Mr. Gonnot** (Acting Director, Division of Social Policies and Social Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) said that the approach to this question had yet to be defined, that the specific situation of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation had certainly not be overlooked, and that the United Nations system was working with different organizations to assess the situation. He suggested submitting an unofficial paper on the question to the Commission for Social Development.

29. **Mrs. Halabi** (Syrian Arab Republic) said she was sceptical and that her delegation would work to ensure that solutions to remedy the problems facing people under occupation were proposed in the conclusions and recommendations to be formulated on this agenda item.

30. **Mr. Hassan** (Sudan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development and said he was deeply concerned by the current world crises, which threatened achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular. Stressing that countries of the South were not responsible for the current crisis, he asked the United Nations to play an active role in reforming the economic and financial system. Countries must introduce a universal multilateral system, one that was rights-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable, and developed countries should provide more resources to help developing countries meet the challenge of food security.

31. It was essential to promote full employment and decent work and to place continued emphasis on the contribution that women, young people, older persons and the disabled were making in the effort to overcome poverty and promote sustainable development. The Group of 77 and China intended to submit resolutions on several important questions, including better respect for the rights of older persons. The twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which would be marked in 2014, should be an occasion for Governments, the United Nations system and civil society to promote the objectives defined in that framework.

32. The Group of 77 and China was pressing the international community to adopt new measures to eliminate the obstacles that were preventing peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation from enjoying their right to self-determination; those obstacles were holding back these people's economic and social development and were incompatible with human dignity.

33. The international community and donor Governments should agree to pay particular attention to the needs of developing countries, in particular those in post-conflict situations and in regions at risk, and to carry through with the commitments they had accepted in the social area, given the current crises which were undermining the efforts made by developing countries to achieve development goals.

34. **Mr. Hassan** welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendations for strengthening international cooperation in the area of official development assistance, debt relief and technical assistance, through the transfer of technologies in particular, and stressed the need to give concrete effect to the political promises of the last 20 years. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals offered an occasion to forge a global partnership and to move forward in combating poverty and hunger, and in this way to promote other objectives, bearing in mind that achieving the MDGs, in particular those relating to social development, should remain one of the pillars of the United Nations system. The Group of 77 and China therefore reaffirmed its commitment to the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

35. **Mrs. Pehrsson** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union, candidate countries (Croatia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) and in addition Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, recalled that although the

economic recession was a worldwide phenomenon it was the low-income countries and the poor that were suffering the most, hence the importance of thoroughly understanding its impact on social development.

36. Social integration was based in particular on the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Millennium Declaration, and sought to create a society for all, where everyone could exercise his rights and responsibilities fully. The establishment of a stable society without exclusions demanded strong political will, transparent decision-making mechanisms, and timely measures, and the European Union was devoted to these imperatives. She therefore welcomed United Nations actions to combat social exclusion and promote social integration, as the responsibility of all.

37. Achieving the most ambitious objectives ever set for development and the elimination of poverty was now threatened by the financial crisis and the economic recession, particularly in Africa, and the European Union shared the concerns of Member States. The United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development had generated proposals for a jobs-intensive recovery and shaping a pattern for sustainable growth in order to soften the impact of the crisis on developing countries. Social integration was in fact synonymous with decent work, but now the economic crisis had sparked an employment crisis and a social crisis, as was evident in recent statistics from ILO. Labour markets, already affected, would suffer the long-term repercussions; at the same time, job losses were being compounded by the weakening of social protection mechanisms and rising poverty, particularly among already marginalized and vulnerable groups.

38. The poor often earned their meagre incomes in the informal sector. They represented more than 50 per cent of the working population in developing countries and 90 per cent in certain countries of Africa and South Asia, and they had only precarious social protection. Recognizing the fundamental role of social protection, the International Labour Conference and the United Nations Chief Executives Board had supported the idea of helping countries prepare a minimum social safety net for all. The time had come to take concrete measures.

39. Drawing attention to the resolution on the Global Jobs Pact (see A/CONF.214/9), which she outlined, Mrs. Pehrsson recalled the commitments given by ILO and its members in the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. The European Union believed that the Pact could be a powerful instrument for speeding and facilitating an exit from the crisis, one in which employment would grow along with the economy.

40. The European Union was giving priority to long-term economic and social viability and was currently seeking a way of softening the repercussions of the crisis through a 10-year strategy for growth and employment, to be adopted next year. One of the main difficulties was to prevent the unemployed from drifting into complete and long-term exclusion from the labour market; this would require expanded access to employment and the creation of new jobs, recognizing that the best way to escape from social exclusion and poverty was to have real prospects in this regard.

41. Vulnerable persons were often the first victims of economic crises, and the last to recover, because of inequalities in access to resources and the means of livelihood. In developing countries disabled persons, who constituted around 10 per cent of the world population, were living for the most part in poverty. To guarantee true access to equal rights presupposed physical accessibility, means of transport, and information and communication technologies in both urban and rural areas, as stressed during the debates that led to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The European Union was pleased with progress to date, as nearly 70 countries had now ratified the Convention. It was also essential to promote gender equality and improve living conditions for vulnerable people in order to create fair and stable societies: the challenge was not merely to achieve social integration but also to protect human rights and economic and environmental viability.

42. The ageing of populations was the sign of great progress on the health front, but it could also pose problems if the working-age population had to take care of a growing number of older persons. The elderly must be treated with dignity and accorded sufficient social protection, but the crisis might oblige them to work beyond the normal retirement age.

43. The high-level debate in the Economic and Social Council had addressed the world health situation, and the MDGs relating to health were intimately linked with those for eliminating poverty and for promoting development and social justice. The link between health and economic resources was obvious: the soundness of an economy depended on the health of its citizens.

44. Young people had never been so numerous, and it was essential to recognize their value in society, to see that they participated actively in development, to protect their health and ensure their social inclusion, and to give them equal chances for a high-quality education and a decent job. In times of crisis, it was important to reinforce application of the World Programme of Action for Youth, to promote access to labour markets, and to ensure good living conditions for the young, not only so that they could develop as individuals but also to ensure sustainable development for our society.

45. Partnerships between civil society and other social partners were imperative for human development and social welfare and for giving the neediest the means to act, especially in times of crisis. In adopting measures to offset the adverse effects of the economic crisis, Governments should avoid short-term solutions that might lead to long-term inactivity or exacerbate inequalities. Policies must be responsible, sound, forward-looking, and designed to ensure a better future and in particular to help those most affected by the crisis. The European Union reconfirmed its dedication to world social development and social inclusion.

46. **Mr. Ntwaagae** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), welcomed the recent Summit on Climate Change and hoped that the conference to be held in Copenhagen in December would produce real results from the debate under way. The current financial, food and energy crises, combined with the effects of climate change, were now added to the existing problems of poverty, underdevelopment and disease, and were delaying achievement of the internationally agreed development objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals.

47. At its forty-seventh session, the Commission for Social Development had examined the question of social integration and had stressed the importance and urgency of involving all members of society in decision-making. Recalling the attention devoted to social integration at the World Summit for Social Development, he welcomed the considerable progress that had been made since then, particularly for marginalized groups, through the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the World Programme of Action for Youth.

48. Nevertheless, there remained a number of problems that must be addressed at the national, regional and international levels in order to achieve the established social development objectives. This would require the institution of effective partnerships with the international community, and collaboration by the international community with development partners, in particular through official development assistance and debt relief and cancellation, thereby allowing developing countries to increase their social investments and gain access to markets and technical assistance programmes.

49. Full social integration was essential for establishing a society based on respect for human rights, equality of opportunities and non-discrimination, a society that encouraged education, vocational training and food security and that guaranteed water supply, protection of the environment, full employment and decent work for all. Poverty elimination, full employment and social integration were inextricably linked as the three pillars of sustainable development focused on the human individual. The SADC was devoted to the principles enshrined in the final document from the World Summit for Social Development and confirmed at the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, and it would continue its efforts to implement them to the best of its ability.

50. **Mr. St. Aimee** (Saint Lucia), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), insisted that development and social integration presupposed an appreciation of the intrinsic value and dignity of the individual, and he reaffirmed his delegation's commitment to this point.

51. While the majority of the Millennium Development Goals were on track to being reached in the Caribbean and other regions, the results were still far from satisfactory when it came to the target for halving extreme poverty by 2015. The economic and financial crises, combined with the climatic crisis, were also threatening the security and the very existence of small island developing States, and CARICOM feared the devastating effects of climate change. The delegation of Saint Lucia agreed with the analysis presented in the report on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth Special Session of the General Assembly (A/64/157) and the recommendations set out therein as to policies for social inclusion, cross-sectoral social policies, and social protection plans.

52. The member States of CARICOM had taken steps to respond to social development needs, and the thirtieth meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government had been largely devoted to food security and stepped-up collaboration in agriculture. In their Liliendaal Declaration, the Heads of Government had recognized the urgency of optimizing regional agricultural production for meeting food and nutritional needs, reducing poverty, and creating incomes and jobs.

53. CARICOM had also adopted abroad cross-sectoral programmes to coordinate national efforts and resolve social problems relating to climate change, education and health, and it appreciated the many initiatives taken in this area by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in particular its analysis of the economic and social consequences that the world crisis was having on the small Eastern Caribbean States. CARICOM had read with interest the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth (A/64/61-E/2009/3), noting the progress made under the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and it welcomed the efforts of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, asking that it be reinforced especially in the most seriously affected regions.

54. CARICOM was also pleased at the creation of the youth employment network, and announced that it would shortly be hosting a special summit devoted to the conclusions and recommendations of its Commission on Youth Development. It had also instituted a regional framework of action to protect children, to foster early childhood development, and to keep children in school, among other goals.

55. Older persons were still excluded from full participation in political, social, economic and cultural life, while populations were ageing at a faster rate. This year marked the tenth anniversary of the Caribbean Charter on Health and Ageing, which coincided with the International Year of Older Persons; CARICOM was working to provide care for older persons in their homes, in their communities, and in special facilities, and was giving priority to economic security, employment and other productive activities for healthy ageing. Consistent with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, CARICOM considered support for families as an essential concern in the preparation of social policies suited to the interests of young people and older persons. The family constituted crucial support for those living in extreme poverty and destitution, and laws and policies were needed to help the family thrive as the foundation of sustainable social development.

56. Progress on the social development front had been slow and uneven, and disrupted by converging crises. CARICOM would continue to cooperate at the national, regional and global levels to accelerate sustainable social growth so as to improve the fate of its people and give practical effect to the collective commitments that had been given.

57. **Mrs. Rovirosa** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Rio Group, welcomed the report on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/64/157), which provided an overview of the discussions on social integration. The examination of the Millennium Development Goals in 2010 and the fifteenth anniversary of the Copenhagen Summit would provide the opportunity to assess achievements to date with respect to social integration, which was an important pillar of the World Summit for Social Development. If Governments and societies where to fulfil their commitment they would have to institute a democratic, pluri-ethnic and multicultural social order based on respecting the fundamental rights of all, including the right to development within a climate of tolerance and respect for diversity.

58. Social integration, then, was not only a question of moral duty and economic efficiency, but also the expression of a contract of solidarity, the goal of which was to ensure the level of development needed to meet people's needs. At a time when the perverse effects of the world economic and financial crisis were making themselves felt, Governments must strive to avoid weakening development assistance and do everything possible to prevent hunger, poverty and social inequalities from worsening. To this end, the countries of the Rio Group were following various policies for promoting social development, stimulating economic growth, creating jobs and reinforcing antipoverty programmes.

59. The Rio Group supported proclamation of an international year of cooperatives as a way of sensitizing public opinion to the contribution that cooperatives were making to economic development. The citizens of Rio Group countries in general, and their indigenous peoples and rural communities in particular, would benefit in this way from access to financing and to productive

lands, to viable production techniques, and to investments in equipment. Women's participation in economic activities should also be promoted.

60. It was also important to support small and medium-sized enterprises, which created many of the jobs within society. The international community should continue to pursue concrete measures at the multilateral and regional levels to overcome the food crisis and ease its impact on the most vulnerable people, and it should also foster rural development and agricultural production. The question of food security, and in particular the crisis sparked by soaring food prices, was of great concern to member countries of the Rio Group, particularly because of its social consequences and its impact on workers' purchasing power.

61. Developed countries must take all the measures necessary to open their markets further to exports from developing countries, to continue reducing the debt burden so that repayment did not stifle development, to promote the beneficial development effects of foreign direct investment, to expand technology transfers, and to improve the international financial architecture.

62. International cooperation, including the commitment by developed countries to devote 0.7 per cent of their GDP to official development assistance, as well as South-South cooperation and sharing of best practices, were essential to promoting development, full employment and equity.

63. The Rio Group had consistently worked to promote the rights and dignity of women, indigenous peoples, youth, older persons, migrants and persons with disabilities, who were often excluded from national development and were still the victims of discrimination. Efforts at the national and international levels to create jobs and combat poverty must take account of equality, social integration, and the mainstreaming of the gender problem, as full employment for women was essential to the economic and social development of all societies.

64. Addressing the situation of youth, she regretted that, in many regions of the world, young people were deprived of decent employment opportunities that would allow them to develop their full potential and contribute to their society. Young people constituted a large percentage of the world population: there were now more than 1.5 billion people between the ages of 15 and 24 years who were demanding immediate measures to meet their needs and allow them to receive the education and training needed to improve their skills and their talents in service to their society.

65. At the same time, the world population was ageing at an ever faster pace. In the developing world, the proportion of the population over 60 years of age would triple, rising from 473 million in 2009 to 1.6 billion in 2050, a demographic trend that foretold severe development problems. The countries of the Rio Group were working actively to define comprehensive social strategies for older persons and they considered that the international community must give closer attention to the problem of ageing, with a view to promoting and protecting the rights of the elderly and strengthening implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action at all levels.

66. The multidimensional nature of poverty demanded new strategies worthy of that name to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals agreed internationally, and this would require the United Nations and the international community to take a more proactive role, given the current situation.

67. **Mrs. Shinohara** (Japan), pointing out that the world was plunged into the deepest recession since the Second World War and that it was the most vulnerable populations that were suffering the most, said it was essential to promote social development in a comprehensive way in order to build a society from which no one was excluded. Because of the recession and the financial crisis, half of the progress that developed countries had made over the last 10 years in fighting poverty would be lost in 2008-2009, and it would take four or five years, once recovery began, for employment to return to its pre-crisis level. It was urgent, then, to take steps to meet people's fundamental needs, to introduce suitable strategies for a sustainable revival of economic growth, and to lay the basis for social integration.

68. The ageing of Japan's population was accelerating (the proportion of persons over 65 years would rise by one third by the year 2035); Japan was determined to involve older persons fully in the activities of society, and the Government had adopted a fundamental law setting out the measures to be taken in this regard.

69. The Japanese Government was also working on behalf of persons with disabilities, and it had a 10-year programme designed essentially to eliminate obstacles to their social participation. That programme would now have to be revised and brought into line with the

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Japan had signed in 2007 and intended to ratify very shortly.

70. Japan was determined to overcome the world crisis by instituting a society that offered health care, education, food and housing to all, and to pursue the objective of increasing productivity and economic activity, which could only be achieved through an approach focused on the human individual.

71. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan), also referring to the worldwide financial, food and energy crises, accentuated by increasingly severe natural disasters sparked by climate change, said that despite the significant progress made in reducing absolute poverty as noted in the overview of the world social situation in 2009 (A/64/158), the Millennium Development Goal of halving absolute poverty by 2015 was far from being achieved. The current world crisis was threatening to reverse previous progress and, in some cases, other millennium development objectives could also be jeopardized. Moreover, official development assistance flows from developed to developing countries risked cutbacks and debt relief might also be reduced. The importance of social development for sustainable development and poverty reduction in these circumstances must not be underestimated.

72. The report on the world economic situation and prospects as of mid-2009 (E./2009/73) estimated that between 73 and 103 million more people would remain poor or fall into poverty in comparison with a situation of continued growth at pre-crisis levels. Most of the setback would be felt in East and South Asia, with between 56 and 80 million people likely to be affected. The most worrisome finding in terms of socioeconomic objectives was that income gaps were widening across the world, and that many individuals and social groups were still marginalized and excluded. Discrimination and human rights violations remained a source of keen concern. Social integration was just as important as the other two pillars of social development – eliminating poverty and promoting full employment and decent work for all. It allowed all groups and individuals to be accommodated within the political, cultural and economic structures of society, where they could participate and contribute fully to its development, but persistent social exclusion was hampering efforts at poverty reduction and ravaging economic growth and social development.

73. To mitigate the impact of a crisis that had hit it hard, Pakistan had taken various steps to expand its export base and diversify its regional trade. The Government had sought to conserve available resources by reducing non-development spending and prioritizing development activities. To boost food supplies it had also raised support prices for wheat in order to encourage farmers to increase their production. It had as well liberalized imports of staple products and launched an income transfer programme to help families headed by disadvantaged women. The medium-term development framework for 2005-2010 was designed to put the economic system on a sustainable footing by reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

74. There were special job quotas for women and persons with disabilities in the public sector, and the private sector was being encouraged to find places for them too. A national commission reporting to the ministry responsible for minorities had been created to oversee the protection of women's rights and their social integration, and committees to promote interfaith harmony had been constituted, comprising eminent local leaders of minority and majority religious communities.

75. Thanks to these measures, Pakistan had been able to turn around its economic situation by building up its foreign exchange reserves, reducing its budget and trade deficits, controlling inflation, boosting the repatriation of capital and foreign direct investments, and restoring consumer confidence, a considerable feat under current circumstances.

76. Without sustained financial commitments, the elimination of hunger and poverty in the world would remain an unachievable dream. The challenge was not so much to make new commitments but to stick to those already made, and strengthening international cooperation was one way to meet that challenge.

77. **Mr. Benitez Verson** (Cuba) said the commitments taken at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development were but mirages for countries of the South and, following the example of other delegations, he underlined the combined impacts of the economic and financial crisis, which were exacerbating the food and energy crises and the adverse effects of climate change. Rich countries remained adamant in defending the existing international order, under which countries of the South were suffering the consequences of an economic crisis that was not of their making.

78. Never before had the world known such profound inequalities. This unsustainable global order had

plunged more than 2.5 billion people into poverty, deprived 1.1 billion people of drinking water, left more than 800 million people illiterate, and denied primary schooling to more than 115 million children.

79. Among other figures illustrating the gap between rich and poor countries, he noted that the world was spending more than $1 billion on the military, but 10 million children were dying every year of preventable diseases. The fact that not even the tiniest portion of the vast amounts used to rescue the banks had gone into the development of countries of the South meant that for many countries the Millennium Development Goals would be impossible to achieve. The current international order was unjust and unsustainable, and financial institutions would have to be rebuilt on new foundations.

80. Since 1959, Cuba had pursued socio-economic transformations that had helped institute a society based on social justice and solidarity, despite the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed by the Government of the United States for more than half a century, the ravages of successive hurricanes, and the current world crisis. Before the revolution, 30 per cent of Cubans were illiterate, while today 8 per cent of the population had university degrees, and education and health services were free. The child mortality rate had fallen and life expectancy had increased to levels better than those in many developed countries. More than two thirds of the Government budget was devoted to education, health, social security and protection, culture, sports, and scientific and technical research.

81. Cuba was sharing its modest resources with countries of the South in a framework of true international cooperation for social development, and it was making its expertise in health, sports and education available to 99 countries and four overseas territories. It had also organized a scholarship programme that had benefited tens of thousands of young people in the third world: more than 31,000 students from 118 countries were pursuing free studies, most of them in medicine, and Cuba also had a literacy programme that had earned praise from UNESCO. With the international community's support, the illegal embargo imposed on the Cuban people would be lifted sooner, and these outcomes could be further improved. A fairer world could be created only through generosity and solidarity.

82. **Mrs. Zhang Dan** (China) pointed to the effects of the current crisis and the fact that they threatened to compromise recent years' progress in social development, compounded as they were by problems relating to climate change, epidemics, the food and energy crises, and natural disasters. All Governments must now commit themselves to sorting out the financial crisis and maintaining social equity and justice.

83. The first thing was to take account of social development imperatives in formulating macroeconomic policies and promoting economic recovery plans, and to reduce the effects of the financial crisis on education, health and social security in order to enhance employment prospects and living conditions. Small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal sectors of the economy also required greater support. The next step must be to strengthen protection for vulnerable groups, who in general suffered the most from the crisis. Countries must adopt more effective policies for helping these groups, redouble efforts to reduce their poverty, and expand education and training programmes for them. Finally, special attention must be given to the problems that developing countries were encountering in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Developed countries should honour their commitments to official development assistance, keep their promises to transfer financial and technological resources, and refrain from protectionist trade measures against developing countries.

84. This year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China. Since the initiation of the process of reform and openness, China had made significant progress in social development and had reached the Millennium Development Goals for reducing poverty and child mortality and improving education and gender equality well in advance of schedule.

85. Since the onset of the world financial crisis, the Chinese Government had remained committed to protecting its people and improving their livelihood, through a series of energetic measures that were beginning to bear fruit.

86. The Government was also paying close attention to the ageing of the Chinese population and was moving at full speed to implement the Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing. Moreover, to address the problems that industrialization and urbanization were posing for care of the elderly in rural areas, China had instituted a new social insurance system. Finally, in June 2008 it had officially ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, giving in this way

a solemn commitment to the international community to apply the Convention.

87. The question of youth was also a priority for the Chinese Government, which was helping young people to form associations, upgrade their skills, and take part in community efforts against juvenile delinquency, as well as HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns. The Government was also combating youth unemployment, for example by giving priority to the employment of university graduates and providing microcredit to young rural dwellers.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.